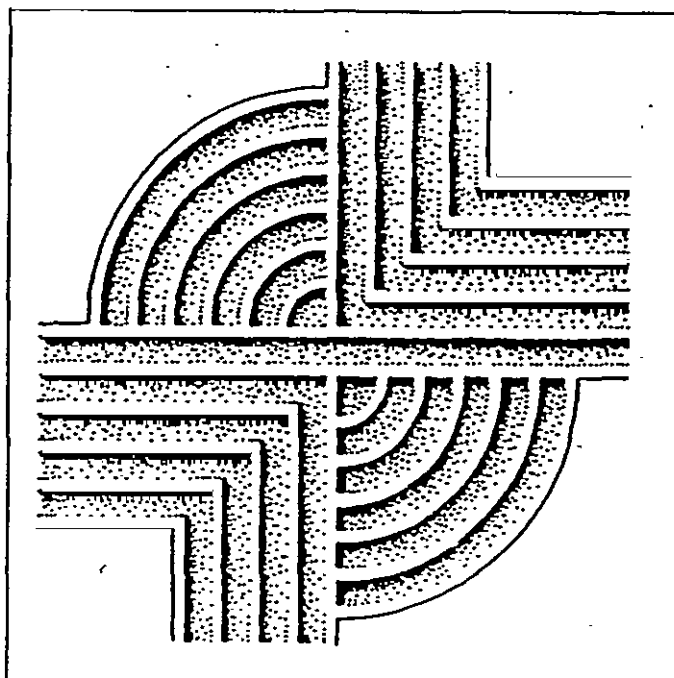


# **MANAGEMENT SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT 38GR190, THE AMERICAN SPINNING COMPANY MILL VILLAGE, GREENVILLE COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA**



## **RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION 98**

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**ALL FIGURES NOT AVAILABLE**

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS  
AT 38GR190, THE AMERICAN SPINNING COMPANY MILL VILLAGE,  
GREENVILLE COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA

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Chicora Research Contribution 98

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## Introduction

Greenville County is bounded to the north by Transylvania, Henderson, and Polk counties, North Carolina, to the west by Pickens and Anderson counties, South Carolina and the Saluda River, to the south by Anderson and Laurens counties, South Carolina and to the east by Laurens and Spartanburg counties, South Carolina. The northern quarter of the County is in the Blue Ridge Mountains, while the remaining portion (including the study tract) is in the Piedmont Plateau. The land ranges from nearly level to very steep with the highest point being White Oak Mountain at 3,297 feet above sea level. In the central portion of the county, where the project area is located, the elevation ranges from 750 to 1,050 feet (Camp 1975).

38GR190 is located to the northeast of the city of Greenville, just east of Old Buncombe Road in the northeastern portion of the county (Figure 1). Boundaries for the site were not obtained since historically they extended beyond the project area. This project area is bounded to the east by the SCL and Southern rail lines. The southern boundary falls halfway between Knight and Buff Streets. The western edge is bounded by private property and the Earle/Stone family cemetery just east of Old Buncombe Road. The northern boundary is irregular, following Morris Street from the western boundary where it turns north in the vicinity of Wright Street. It then turns east to Davis Street and follows the road north to Neely Street where it turns east again to the railroad tracks. Several paved roads run through the tract including Buff Street, Sizemore Street, Morris Street, Church Street, and an old road bed which follows the railroad tracks (Figure 2). In addition, sidewalks, driveway lead-ins, and cement stairs from the street to the sidewalks exists throughout the project area.

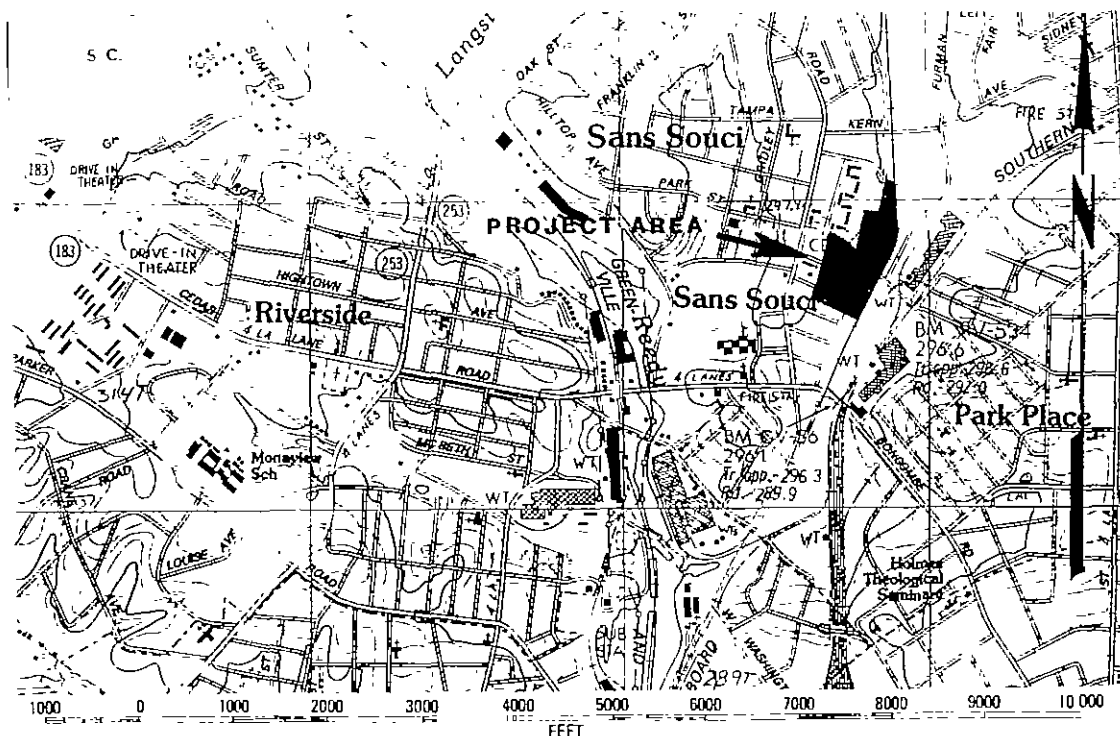


Figure 1. Location of project area on 1983 Greenville and Paris Mountain Quadrangle Maps.

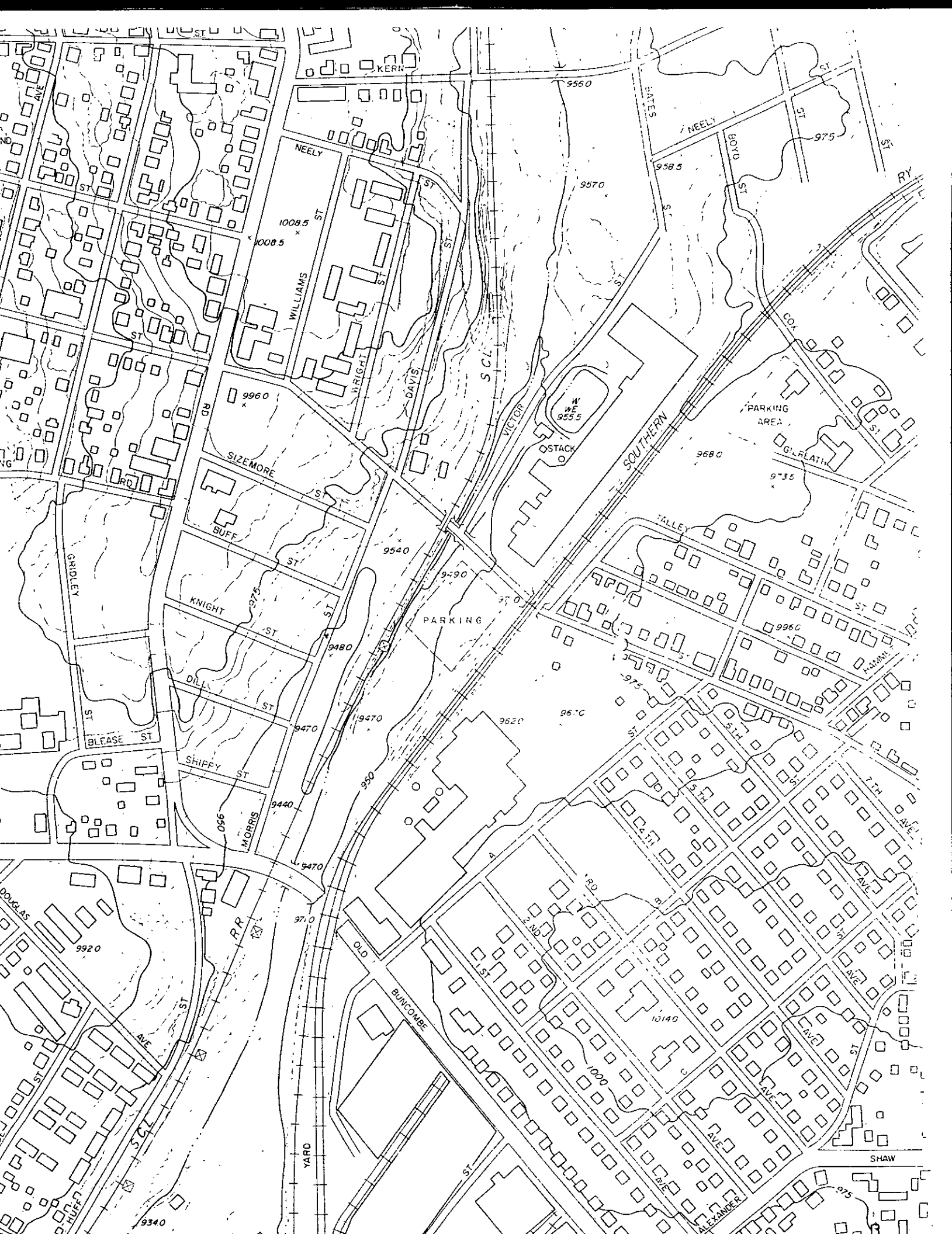
Figure 2. Location of study area showing street names, railroads, and generalized contours.

Vegetation within the project area consists of thick knee-high grass. Apparently the tract is occasionally mowed since no other undergrowth or secondary growth exists. Trees are relatively sparse and appear to have been planted as shade or ornamental trees perhaps 50 to 100 years ago. Kudzu is found in the extreme northern portion of the property, and there is relatively dense vegetation in the area of the railroad tracks.

Soils are exclusively Cecil urban-land complex. Cecil soils consist of gently sloping to moderately steep soils that are well drained. These soils are complex because Urban land consists of areas that have been excavated, filled, or otherwise disturbed by man. Generally, the surface layer is dark-brown sandy loam about six inches thick overlying subsoils which extend for about 52 inches. These subsoils are primarily red clay (Camp 1975).

Elevations in the project area range from 950 to 995 feet above mean sea level. The highest elevations are in the western portion of the tract and slope down toward the railroad tracks to the east. Individual areas, or lots, within the project can exhibit considerable slopes. Some areas show evidence of remnant terracing, probably to facilitate construction of individual structures.

The 16 acre project area is intended to be developed with affordable housing and the project, coordinated by the Greenville County Redevelopment Authority (GCRA), has U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development involvement. This work will involve extensive land modification, including grubbing and stripping of areas, on-slab construction, trenching for utilities, and other ground disturbing activities. Because of this federal involvement, the



South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (SC SHPO) recommended that the project area receive a reconnaissance level survey in a letter to the GCRA. The Authority requested that Chicora Foundation conduct this survey and as a result one site (38GR190) was identified (Adams and Trinkley 1992).

Historical research conducted by Ms. Ann McCuen of the Greenville County Historical Preservation Commission and Chicora Foundation revealed that site 38GR190 consisted of a late nineteenth and early twentieth century mill village first associated with the O.H. Sampson Mill and later the American Spinning Company. It operated from 1898 until the late 1950s. The site was found to encompass the entire 16 acre tract with actual boundaries extending further for an unknown distance. Based on the findings from shovel testing and surface collection which indicated that the whole tract was an archaeological site, close interval shovel testing was only performed to explore a few, very selected, areas. A total of 52 shovel tests were excavated. During the initial walkover of the property, ten structure areas were identified as containing above ground structural features or surface remains, and three of those (Structure 7, 8, and 9) were more intensively shovel tested. The area labelled "office" on the 1920 tax map (Figure 3) was also investigated.

In general, soil profiles indicated that the top 0.5 feet was dark brown in color (10YR4/3). Below this was red clay subsoil (2.5YR4/6). Although conducted at a reconnaissance level, the testing revealed the presence of in situ remains, structural remains, intact soil profiles, dense artifacts, and lack of surface disturbances. In addition, our preliminary research revealed abundant historic documentation (including Sanborn Insurance maps) that could be used in conjunction with archaeological research to address a variety of significant research questions. As a consequence the site was recommended eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places at a State level of significance.

Based on Chicora's study, the site was determined by the SC SHPO as eligible for inclusion on the National Register. A Memorandum of Agreement between the SC SHPO and the GCRA was developed, but has not been signed by either the Authority or the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (Mr. Charlie Hall, personal communication 1992).

Chicora Foundation was requested by Mr. Bill Slough of GCRA to prepare a technical and budgetary proposal for data recovery at the site, initially with a \$12,000 maximum ceiling. A proposal for those investigations was submitted by Chicora on November 13, 1992. The cost of the scope of work exceeded the amount the Authority was able to fund, and Chicora was requested to reduce the scope of work to a maximum cost of \$8500. In consultation with Mr. Charlie Hall of the SC SHPO, this reduction was developed and a second proposal was submitted on November 30, 1992. This proposal, incorporating very limited testing at two house lots on the site, was accepted by the Authority on December 11, 1992. While only representing a very small sample of the project area (the two lots represent a sample of about 2.7% of the 73 lots, while an anticipated excavation of 400 square feet would represent a sample of less than 0.06%), the available funding severely limited the investigative techniques or methodology and the sample size.

This management summary has been prepared immediately upon completion of the fieldwork at 38GR190 and does not contain detailed information on artifact analysis, or any detailed field evaluations. It is intended solely to provide a brief descriptive statement of the work conducted by Chicora and to allow the SC SHPO to verify that the proposed work has actually been accomplished.

Archaeological investigations were begun at 38GR190 by a crew of three (including the principal investigator) on December 16, 1992 and continued through December 21, 1992. In addition to the Chicora archaeologists, there were from two to six volunteers assisting at the site. A total of 220.5 person hours were spent in the field (with nearly 55% of the person hours attributable to volunteers) and

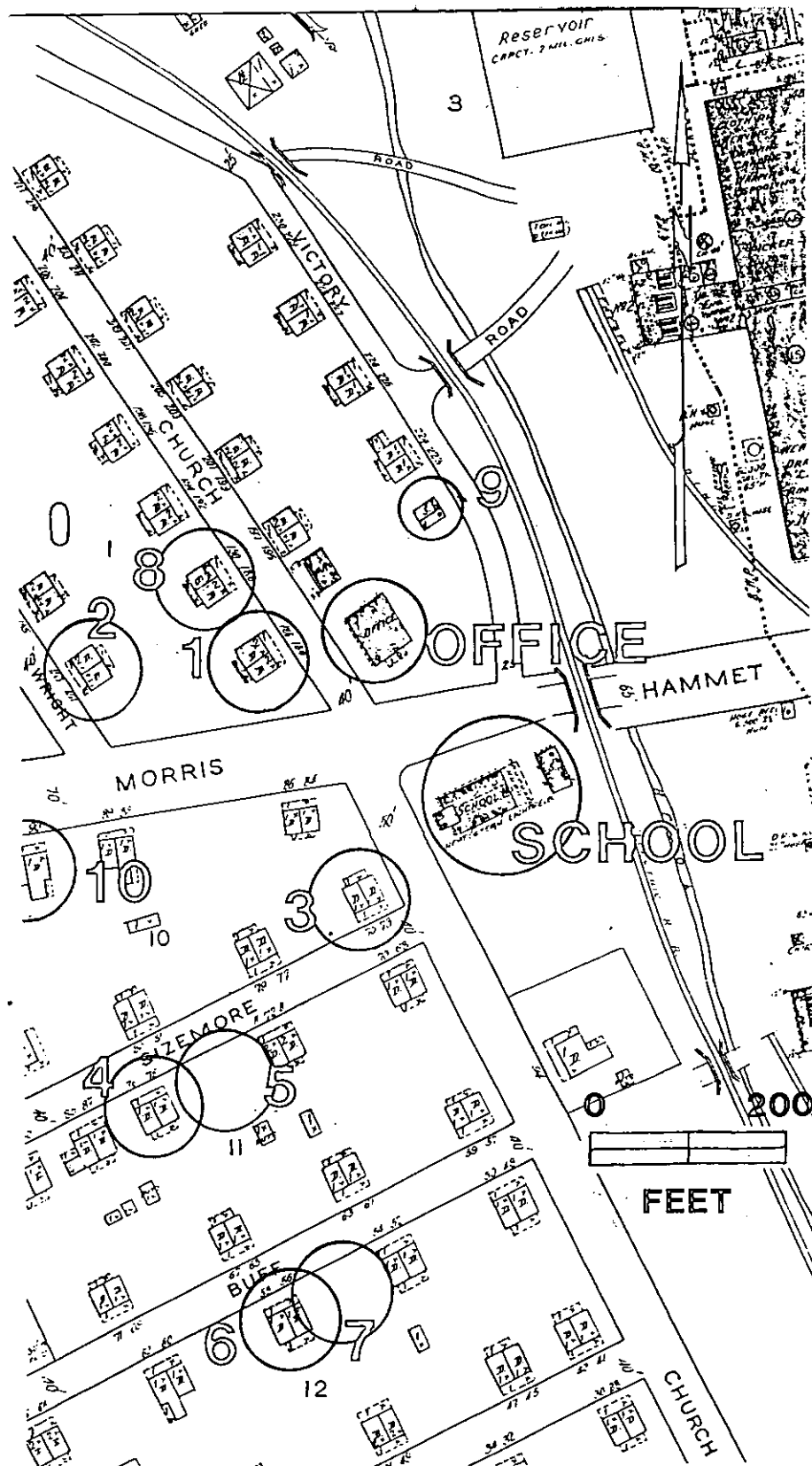


Figure 3. Structures archaeologically located during reconnaissance as shown on the 1920 Sanborn Map.



an additional 24 person hours were spent on laboratory analysis and field processing. As a result of this work 300 square feet (12 5-foot units) of site area were opened. This resulted in the excavation of over 185 cubic feet of soil, all dry screened through ¼-inch mesh.

The proposed investigations at 38GR190 were to include the examination of two structures -- one worker's and one supervisor's house. There was only one supervisory structure thought to exist in the project area. Based on the available maps, it is larger, isolated from the remainder of the village, and exhibits a different floor plan. The availability of only one such structure limited our options of choice. Unfortunately, the area appeared to be somewhat disturbed. It had been extensively used by indigents and exhibited a large quantity of recent debris. In addition, the lot sat in a low area adjacent to a creek. While it is curious that such a low lot would be used for a supervisor, several oral history accounts confirmed the occupation. One individual had photographs which showed portions of this structure in the background. It was clearly different from the others and was elevated about 6 feet off the ground on brick piers (apparently to eliminate the flood risk).

Unfortunately, the large quantity of rain at the beginning and throughout the project caused this area to flood. Based on this flooding and the disturbance to the site, excavations at this structure were abandoned and a second worker's structure was chosen for excavation. This approach, while not allowing very useful comparisons to be made among village occupants of clearly different social and economic status, did allow the comparison of two workers of similar perceived social and economic status.

#### Excavations at 38GR190

The site grid was laid out over two structures (7 and 8) to incorporate entire residential lots. The grid at Structure 7, identified in the field notes as Area 3, was oriented N19°E and is tied into the south east intersection of Buff and Church Streets. The grid at Structure 8, identified in the field notes as Area 1, was oriented N14°E and is tied into the centerline of Church Street and the north side of Morris Street. Vertical control was maintained through the use of two nearby temporary mean sea level (MSL) benchmarks. At Structure 7 the benchmark is a spray painted point on Buff Street with an elevation of 975 feet MSL. The same type of bench mark was used at Structure 8 which was located in a paved parking area at the corner of Church and Morris Streets with an elevation of 970 feet MSL.

The excavations throughout the site used natural stratigraphic zones. Zone 1 consisted of dark brown clayey loam varying in depth from about 0.3 to 0.6 feet. Zone 2 (where it exists) consisted of reddish brown loamy clay with quantities of coal, varying in depth from 0.1 to 0.5 feet.

Both Zone 1 and 2 soils were dry screened through 1/4-inch mesh using mechanical sifters. Units were usually trowelled at the base of Zone 2 (or Zone 1, if no Zone 2 was present), photographed in b/w and color slides, and plotted.

Field notes were prepared on pH neutral, alkaline buffered paper and photographic materials are being processed to archival standards. All original field notes, with archival copies, will be curated at a repository selected by Chicora Foundation in consultation with the SC SHPO. Individuals associated with the Greenville County Historical Preservation Commission have requested that the materials be curated locally and may seek to be the curatorial facility. All specimens will be evaluated for conservation needs and will be treated prior to curation.

As previously discussed, a total of 12 5-foot units were excavated by Chicora Foundation at the site. Nine of these were placed at Structure 7, while the remaining three were placed at Structure 8 (Figures 4 and 5).

As originally suspected, the units were found to contain relatively intact deposits. However, they were unexpectedly rich in artifact content. In fact, test unit 1 at Structure 8 yielded three "10-lb." bags of artifacts. Faunal remains were found to be rare, but the examples recovered were well preserved and are capable of contributing not only species data, but also butchering information.

The excavations revealed a number of features. At Structure 7, TU1 contained a clay cap which (based on local informants) may have been part of a clay (or grass) tennis court built ca. 1940. Below the cap was another zone of artifacts representing an earlier, and sealed, yard surface. At the base was what appears to be a ditch which was filled with a large number of artifacts including several whole bottles (Figure 6). TU3 contained a shallower ditch which was filled with rocks and coal clinkers, possibly in an effort to landscape the area.

At Structure 8, TU3 contained what appears to be a shallow drip line feature at the back (north) edge of the house. TU5 contained a builder's trench for the existing sidewalk. TU6, while not containing any identifiable features, did contain a number of unusual items such as a loom part, a water pipe, two intact glass containers, as well as a number of brick fragments and rocks (Figure 7). It is likely that these objects were deposited in a shallow gully area. TU9 contained a thin linear feature which was not excavated but may represent the ditch for a pipe line servicing the house. In the southwestern corner of the unit were a number of bricks which appear to represent a walkway.

Excavations in Area 3 (Structure 8) also revealed intact piers associated with the 1898 structure. The yard excavations reveal that few artifacts were deposited under the structure and that soil build-up in this area was very slight. Front yard excavation suggests slightly more soil deposition and more common artifacts, although the area was not extensively used for trash disposal. Near rear yard excavations at Areas 1 and 3 both revealed moderate to heavy trash disposal. Artifact density increased toward the rear lot line in Area 1, but tended to decrease at Area 3, suggesting either an inadequate sample size or idiosyncratic behavior. Photographs from the late 1930s produced by an oral

Figure 4. Excavations at Structure 7.

**BUFF STREET**

**CHURCH STREET**



APPROXIMATE LOCATION OF STRUCTURE

TU4

TU7

TU6

TU3

TU9

TU8

TU1

TU2

APPROXIMATE LOT LINES

SIDEWALK



APPROXIMATE LOCATION OF GARAGE

Figure 5. Excavations at Structure 8.

Figure 6. East profile of Test Unit 1, Structure 8.

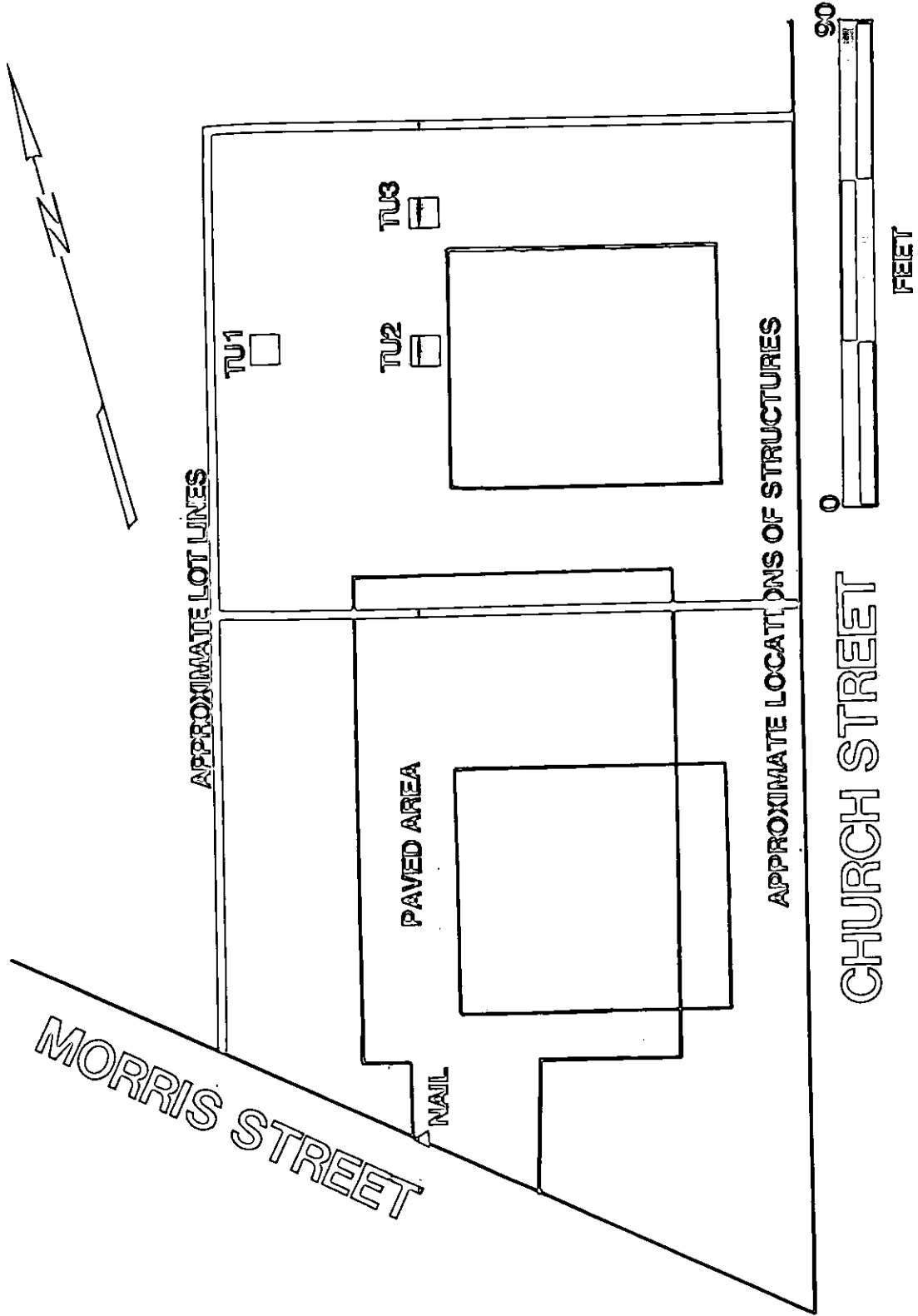


Figure 7. In situ artifacts at Structure 7, Test Unit 6.

informant showed a grassed front yard and swept rear yard, although it is not known how consistent this pattern was, either spatially or temporally.

#### Interpretations

These investigations have explored a very small percentage of site 38GR190 as defined within the boundaries of the original reconnaissance study. The entire site boundaries have not been determined. The excavations undertaken, however, appear to have yielded material and information representative of that portion of the site contained within the project area of the Greenville County Redevelopment Authority.

The excavations at 38GR190 reveal a late nineteenth and twentieth century mill village site with no other components represented. This site has yielded information about a site type which has not been previously explored. Based on this limited data recovery, the results have yielded significant information. While textile mills attempted to make life full for its workers in the village through the creation of schools, health centers, and recreation facilities (such as tennis courts and swimming pools), the workers were still financially impoverished and their diets appear to have been quite limited. Materially, their lives appear not to have been much better than it was when they or their parents were tenant farmers or small land owners.

While many families had vegetable gardens in the rear of their houses, very few canning-related artifacts were recovered. In addition, no tin can fragments were found at the site. This is in contrast to rural tenant sites where jars and jar sealers are numerous. It appears that during the winter time, few vegetables were available to mill workers. The sparsity of animal bone suggests that fresh

meat was a rare treat year round. Ceramics were primarily inexpensive whitewares and decalcomanias, and no elaborate or high status personal or furniture related items were recovered.

The work also identified the presence of industrial (textile mill) objects in domestic contexts. Some, such as the metal rings from spindles, were likely deposited as a result of the purloined spindles being used as fire wood. Others, such as loom parts and loom weights, cannot be explained. It is curious, however, that these objects have been identified in the domestic refuse, even when such a small sample is involved.

As previously discussed, the work has contributed to a better understanding of refuse disposal. While the mill, in the late 1930s and 1940s, had a garbage dump, it is clear that considerable trash was incorporated into the yards. Likewise, it is obvious that considerable land modifications were made to either better drain the yards or to serve as lot boundaries. Regardless, these were eventually filled in with trash.

This limited work has offered some tantalizing possibilities for addressing similarities and differences between urban mill workers and rural tenant farmers; primarily in diet and material wealth.

In addition, the work at 38GR190 revealed that there is an incredibly rich oral history resource for the American Spinning Company mill village. A large number of former residents visited the site during the excavations and shared their recollections. Most of these individuals were children, adolescents, or young men and women in the 1930s. Some indicated that they had living parents. Unfortunately, this project was not designed to collect the oral history information in a consistent fashion. For example, individuals were allowed to discuss what they remembered, with few specific lines of inquiry outlined. If this oral history is not tapped soon it will be lost entirely.

The oral history research did identify areas which might be profitably investigated. For example, while those living in the village during the late 1920s remembered privy tanks on the back porch which were periodically emptied into trucks, a few of the older inhabitants remembered that privies were originally located toward the rear of each house lot. It seems likely that these may have served as convenient repositories once they were no longer being used.

We initially felt that 38GR190 offered an unusual opportunity to study a mill village with clear temporal limits. We came to discover, through discussions with Wes Breedlove who has recorded over 1200 sites in Greenville County, that the site is unique. There is no other abandoned mill village which offers such tight, sealed contexts. This dramatically increases the significance of 38GR190 beyond that originally ascribed. If the questions proposed for this site have significance, and we believe they do, they are likely answerable nowhere else other than at 38GR190. Other mill villages have either been totally destroyed by recent developments or are still active residential communities. The former are no longer accessible for research and the latter present significant difficulties isolating occupational depositions.

Some research questions, such as the similarities and differences between operatives and supervisors could not be explored during this work. The work which has been conducted has already raised a variety of new, and previously unanticipated, questions regarding refuse disposal, sanitation, community patterns, and unusual structural functions. For example, the oral informants have revealed three phases of sanitation at the village. Originally privies at the rear lot lines were used, followed by in-house containers which were emptied into holding tanks, with sewers being installed in the 1930s. These changes may be marked with other social and refuse disposal pattern changes.

The oral informants also spoke extensively about the school. The constant

references to this one structure, even before references to their own houses or the mill itself, suggest that the school was a focal point in the community. As such, archaeological investigations in this area might have been able to more accurately reconstruct social activities which took place in the mill. Several informants also made references to the "pest house" -- a specific building for families, children, and even pregnant women with infectious diseases. While it might seem that medical histories could supply all the necessary information, in fact they are concerned only with the clinical information. Further, such sources are rarely based on the medicine practices among mill hands or among others in the lower socio-economic areas. References to various public health studies (e.g. Goldberger et al. 1918) in mill villages, for example, clearly reveal that traditional physicians played a very small part in the lives of the mill operatives. Consequently, archaeological investigation of the "pest house" might have been able to more accurately document the health care of Greenville's mill workers.

In summary, site 38GR190 combines a variety of unusual archaeological and historical features:

- the site is well preserved with intact features,
- artifact density is high and there is considerable artifact diversity,
- it can be tightly dated both historically and archaeologically,
- the site exhibits considerable documentary history,
- there is an active and interested population capable of contributing oral history, and
- the site has attracted exceptional public interest and had generated unusual excitement in the preservation of Greenville's heritage.

The site has surpassed the expectations based on the reconnaissance level investigation and the very limited testing conducted at the site has assembled a very impressive assemblage of data. As anticipated when the scope of the investigations was reduced, many of the questions originally proposed cannot be satisfactorily answered, although the site certainly indicated that the data is present. Likewise, during the excavations many previously unanticipated questions were developed and it is clear that the site has the potential to answer a much wider range of inquiries than originally contemplated. Finally, it is also clear that many other sites, especially those which have been continuously occupied for long periods, are less likely candidates for intensive research.

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